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DONIZETTI:

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY M. DE THÉMINES.

Translated for the ART JOURNAL from the French,
BY MARGARET CECILIA CLEVELAND.

VI.

Donizetti was called to Naples. He was to compose *La Zingara*, a *semi-seria* opera, for the *Teatro Nuovo*. It is from this work that his musical career may be dated; it is the one which had the most success, which made his name known, which placed the young composer among the number of Italian composers.

Rossini was then in the zenith of his musical cycle. He had broken the fetters which impeded the expansion of the lyrical drama, he had accomplished that great revolution, which caused the old musicians encrusted in routine to shudder with horror, and filled the confiding youth with hope and enthusiasm.

Among the art veterans who remained faithful to the old flag, was Sigismondi, the Librarian of the Conservatoire of Naples; Sigismondi, the most hostile among the masters towards Rossini and the new school, and who had pardoned the author of *Il Barbiere* and *Otello* his emancipation from the

precepts until that time considered as unalterable dogmas.

As composer, Sigismondi looked upon Rossini as profane, audacious and mad; as Librarian, he was obliged to reserve a place for the works of the bold innovator, in the archives of the Conservatoire. Indeed, hardly could he restrain himself from tendering his resignation as Librarian, so repugnant to his conscience was the office which required him to preserve works so entirely opposite, he said, to the same doctrines of the masters of the art. He, therefore, accepted unwillingly the care of Rossini's original scores, but laid them away upon the highest shelf of the library, and put a padlock to the ladder. As it would be necessary to ask for the key of the padlock in order to arrive at the forbidden fruit, he would then decide whether he would grant or refuse the demand of the imprudent pupil, desirous of tasting the forbidden fruit.

Donizetti was dying to read the works of him who was to become the master of masters. Like the fox in the fable, he made a thousand *détours* to reach there. Sigismondi entered at the moment when Donizetti was giving himself up to certain strange gymnastics in endeavoring to reach the hidden treasure.

"What are you doing there, *malheureux*? What, you also! *Tu quoque!* Do you wish to be lost, poisoned, consumed, destroyed? Descend."

The young musician obeyed. But he had *esprit*, and knew how to turn it to his advantage.

"Master," said he to Sigismondi, "I agree with you perfectly in regard to the inundations of that *brigand* (this was the mildest qualification with which Sigismondi honored poor Rossini), and I certainly do not wish to poison myself; but I have acquired the true principles of art from the school of Mayr, of Pilotti, of Mattei, and I should be glad to know the rocks that are to be avoided, against which I might unconsciously be wrecked, carried away by the fatal prevailing fashion. In one word, I know now how one should

write, and am desirous to know what one should avoid."

"*A la bonne heure!*" said Sigismondi. "You are right, one ought to know the evil, to appreciate all the extent of danger to be avoided."

"Precisely. The Spartans, our austere masters, did they not point out to their children the spectacle of a drunken man to disgust them with wine?"

"It is true. Well, I will give you the key to the padlock. Bring me the ladder. We will run over together those pestilential works, those infernal pages. You will have enough of them!"

Donizetti did not wait to be told twice. A few seconds after he returned with the ladder, mounted the steps with the impetuosity of youth, and descended even faster than he had ascended, with the scores in his arms.

These scores were *Il Barbiere* and *Otello*.

"*Il Barbiere!*" cried Sigismondi, red with anger. "Can one be so impudent, so presumptuous and irreverential as to dare to treat of the same subject as the immortal Paisiello? *Il Barbiere!* But that is madness. This the Roman public well knew when they hissed it."

"I was told," said Donizetti, "that that was a cabal headed by Paisiello himself."

"What an infamous calumny! Oh! that Rossini has truly been vomited from hell upon the earth!"

"That is also my opinion, master."

"Well, no; I could never have the strength to go over the *Barbiere*. Take it if you wish, read it if you can, and wash your hands of it afterwards. Let us rather look at *Otello*. In that, at least, the rash fellow has not followed in the steps of the masters."

And Sigismondi opened the score of *Otello* with the same repugnance as if he was dealing with a revolting object. If he had found the tongs in his way, he would have used them with pleasure.

It was the orchestral score. Upon the margin was the indication of the instruments—1st cor., 2d cor., etc.

"Two horns! What for?" said Sigis-

mondi, who prefaced everything. "I ask, why have any horns in *Otello*?"

Then he started, for he saw down lower 3d and 4th cor.

"Four!" he exclaimed. "Are we, then, hunting the stag! The theatre, has it become the forest of the Astroni? It is a chase, not an opera."

Donizetti was bursting with laughter, but he kept a sober face.

Sigismondi turned over a few pages.

Suddenly, from being red, he became purple. His eyes projected, his lips trembled; he raised his hands towards the heavens; he tried to speak, but anger prevented him; he could only point out the page to young Gaetano, who looked at it, but did not comprehend the anger of the worthy Librarian.

"Well?" said he, interrogatively.

"How!" roared Sigismondi, who had recovered his speech, "do you not see? There, there, there!" And with his trembling finger he struck the margin of the score.

"Do you not see? 123 trombones!—123! Where are we, great gods! What is to become of us! 123 trombones!"

Thrusting his hands into his hair, he fled, crying: "123 trombones!"

Donizetti followed his glance, and returning to the spot indicated on the score, found this: "1, 2, 3, *trombone*." Unfortunately the author had neglected to place a comma after each figure, so that poor Sigismondi had read, instead of 1st, 2d, and 3d trombone, 123 trombones.

Notwithstanding this, Donizetti read at his leisure the *chef d'œuvres* of the "*Cygne du Pesaro*."

He was in Heaven.

It was after the perusal of these immortal pages that he commenced to write *La Zingara*.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

PAINTERS' PERILS.

We determined to shoulder our knapsacks and start off into North Wales by the Great Western Railway, and go as far as it would take us. After spending a pleasant time wandering by the Wye, we took seats one very wet morning on the mail-coach from Hereford to Aberystwith, which we resolved to make our headquarters for the main object of our expedition, viz., the bringing back a folio of sketches.

One of our first excursions was, naturally, to the Devil's Bridge, a well-known spot some few miles inland from the coast. We tramped out there, secured our quarters at the comfortable inn, and immediately started, with all the enthusiasm for which in those days we were both celebrated, to explore and mark down the choicest localities and picturesque points where we might best avail ourselves of the brush or pencil.

It is a vain speculation, I imagine, endeavoring to find out why the devil has built so many bridges, scooped out so many punch-bowls, basins and bays, or driven his spade and pickaxe into so many chasms and passes; but certain it is, that he has had a considerable hand in moulding some of the boldest and most paintable parts of the world, if we are to take the fact of his name being associated with them as a proof that they were the result of his superintendence.

I will not stop to recapitulate even some of those most familiar to travelers and artists; all that it is necessary for me now to do is to describe slightly the nature of this particular record of Satan's skill and handi-

work. At the time of which I am speaking, and when my old chum, Michael Hallidown, and I were a good many years younger, this spot seemed to me to be a very devilish sort of place indeed. "Awfully wild and grand," "A wonderful place for sketching," and other rapturous ejaculations were poured forth, characteristic of the aforesaid enthusiasm. We had not been over the St. Gothard then, nor caught a glimpse of the thousand and one far wilder and more picturesque localities bearing his Satanic Majesty's cognomen. Knowing nothing better, it did well enough for us, and certainly the freshness of our enjoyment was ample compensation for our ignorance. It was a bliss never surpassed by all our increased artistic powers and wider knowledge of fine scenery.

We have been for many sketching and walking trips since then, but we have never had a jollier time. It is the old story, and the "Devil's Bridge" near Aberystwith, viewed through the medium of our youth and vigor, was magnified into all that was requisite for our happiness. Green peas, I suppose, have still the same flavor to fellows of one-and-twenty that they ever had; the hours of the ballet must still appear the priceless pearls we then thought them; but clap another score of years upon our heads—the peas are *fade*, and the opera dancers very ordinary paste—a spurious imitation, which the microscope of time enables us to detect from the genuine jewel. And so the "Devil's Bridge" was delightful.

We descended the wood-clad ravine, which led down to the rocky mountain stream, whose waterfall, at the furthest limit of our view, came sparkling, dancing, gurgling and dashing, and doing much of what Southey said the water does at Lodore. This, we conceived, would be the most attractive feature for a sketch, and to get a view of it from a good point of vantage was our main object. We reached the bed of the river, and found no difficulty in crossing from side to side, by hopping, skipping and jumping upon the big boulders and rocks that, from the comparative low state of the stream, were exposed in masses of various size and form, round which the waters gurgled and eddied bright and glittering, and with a music new and delightful to our ears.

The fall itself was a meagre affair after all, but pretty enough to look at; we had not then learned that, as a rule, waterfalls do not make good pictures. But what had we learned? Why, this was almost the very first time that either of us had ever seen a mountain stream, and it would have been rather strange if, loving Nature as we did, we should not have eagerly desired to bring a reminiscence of it away.

The rocky ledge over which the water poured was not above half covered, but it was very pretty, and the vista leading up to it, shut in by steeply-shelving crags, surmounted by young ash and oak trees, here and there almost arching across it, formed a lovely frame-work to the central point of light. We explored the spot thoroughly, and found, in most places, that the banks of the river were so precipitous as to be inaccessible, and, having gone down its course some distance, we came upon the top of a second waterfall deeper than the first, and a place that we felt it would be by no means pleasant to take a "header" over.

We were obliged to retrace our steps across the straggling boulders before we could regain the upper bank, where the path

lay through the wood by which we had descended. In fact, upon closer search, we discovered that it was nearly the only place where it was possible to reach the stream itself, so closely was it shut in by rock and wood. The well-worn path brought us with such little difficulty to this point of access that we were scarcely conscious of the trouble we might have had to get down to the water if we had not struck this particular way.

We at last determined on the place from which we would make our sketch. It was one of the largest flat top table-like sort of rocks, nearly in the centre of the stream, and easily reached by aid of some half-dozen stepping stones. This would do capitally; the composition and effect were perfect, and we made up our minds to set to work upon this pet subject early next morning, with that determination which the youthful aspirant to the noble art of painting is known to possess.

As soon as it was light the following day, Mike came to me with the most forlorn expression of countenance.

"It rains like mad, my dear fellow—coming down in torrents; not a chance of putting your head outside the door for the next twenty-four hours, I can tell you; what a country this is for rain! I shall go to bed again."

Mike was not good at early rising, and it was nothing but his artistic enthusiasm which could have torn him from his bed so soon after dawn to look at the state of the weather. Yes, it was a soaker, but it could not damp our ardor; and when, a little before noon, the clouds began to lift, and rays of sunshine glittered across the hill sides, lighting up the valley which lay in all its autumnal beauty at our feet, we made preparations for a start.

Burning to get to work, we were soon on our way, heavily laden with necessary and unnecessary paraphernalia, to take up the position we had settled on the day before. Very spongy was the ground, and though it had ceased raining, the brisk wind, as it drifted heavy masses of the remnants of the rain-clouds across the sky, also besprinkled us pretty freely with water from the shimmering leaves. Arrived on the bank from which our bit of table-land was accessible, we were somewhat dismayed to find our stepping-stones of yesterday not nearly so numerous, nor so much exposed. The river had risen, but we thought nothing of this, and with only a slight addition here and there to the length of our strides, and an occasional foot-wetting, without much difficulty we reached our station in the middle of the stream before described. Here we unlimbered, arranged our stools side by side, got out frames and blocks, and commenced our labor in earnest. The scene looked far finer than it had done on our previous visit. There was more water coming over the fall, and the ever-changing clouds and sunshine gave an immense variety to the light and shade, which though puzzling to the painter, yet greatly enhanced the attractions of the spot. Mike and I worked pretty equally, and had finished our pencil outline much about the same time, when a passing shower obliged us to seek temporary refuge under our sketching umbrellas, which we had left on the bank, for it was impossible to stick them in the hard rock where we were sitting. We got rather more wet-footed this time in going to and fro, but neither of us seemed